

The CAP: community gardens, net-zero new buildings, curbside composting

The Bethlehem Gadfly Climate Action Plan December 11, 2020

 *Latest in a series on Bethlehem's Climate Action Plan* 

Climate Action Plan

The draft of the historic Climate Action Plan contains several specific strategies that we'll give you a taste of over two or three posts. Gadfly is sorry that he can't do better on the print size, but the short audios should fill you in. The full report will soon be on the City web site, and Gadfly will advise you when.

Support local gardens and urban farms

Environmental justice considerations:

Healthier food will lead to healthier communities. The program should ensure that soil safety is part of the program for communities that may have a legacy of soil contamination. Allow rooftop gardening for people who don't have yards. Support food-growing skill development in urban youth programs. The policies should expand community gardens where residents can help grow and harvest food in public spaces, which especially benefits renters who have no yard space or rooftop access of their own. Gardens should be in low-income areas, food deserts, and areas with high air pollution and/or little public green space currently. Gardens could provide spaces for growing culturally relevant foods.

Implementation considerations:

The City could create an incentive program to encourage local businesses to donate unused land as local gardens. In addition to supporting the siting of local gardens and urban farms, the City could create a volunteer program to help maintain gardens (e.g., remove weeds and keep the garden tidy). Garden and urban farm upkeep presents an opportunity for education opportunities and engagement with local schools for class or capstone projects. The City should explore the depression-era & WWII 'Victory Gardens' as an example of what could be done.

Implement net-zero emissions standards for new buildings

Environmental justice considerations:

Consider how NZE building code requirements could increase cost of housing and explore options to offset costs for low- and middle-income homeowners. It is already cost prohibitive for most developers to build low- and middle-income housing.

Implementation considerations:

As this would require enacting standards higher than the state's, implementation may involve the passing a Right to a Healthy Climate ordinance or Home Rule Charter, as described in the Municipal Operations section. Other possible avenues for pushing standards higher include: (1) requiring all-electric buildings and/or banning gas hookups and mandating that all buildings produce on-site or procure off-site renewable energy or (2) adopt Architecture 2030's [Zero Code](#) via the zoning code, which requires a building to meet its minimum energy code and also procure or produce 100% clean energy its operations. The City should consider the Zero Code as a tool for implementing this strategy. The Zero Code was developed by [Architecture 2030](#) as the first national and international net-zero-carbon standard for new commercial, institutional, and mid- to high-rise residential buildings. The code integrates cost-effective energy efficiency measures and is designed to complement base energy code (IECC/ASHRAE) by specifying a path for meeting a building's energy needs with on-site renewable energy or by procuring renewable energy off-site. Zero Code was added to the 2021 IECC as an appendix, which will likely scale up its adoption in the near future. Pennsylvania's restrictions around code adoption present challenges to passing Zero Code into law at the municipal level. Other municipalities facing similar restrictions on local code adoption have used their planning or zoning codes to incorporate the Zero Code. Bethlehem should consider this approach and coordinate with other Pennsylvania municipalities seeking to adopt the code.

Create a curbside composting program

Environmental justice considerations:

Multilingual education should be provided on all changes. Education needs to focus on what composting is, how to know what is compostable, and why it should be done. Reduction in volume of edible food should not be coupled with composting, as it conflates two separate issues. The composting program should not be cost prohibitive for low-income residents. If the pilot program has cost to residents, then should be waived for low-income participants and bins should be provided for free. If property ownership and associated land is required to compost, find ways to make composting available to renters and apartment dwellers through a city pick-up program or creation of communal composting sites. In time, it will reduce the cost of garbage pick-up for residents because they will have less waste.

Implementation considerations:

This strategy can reduce the amount of methane produced in landfill, conserve landfill space, reduce use of synthetic fertilizers, and eventually reduce the cost of garbage collection for residents. To implement a curbside program, the City would initially identify an organization or facility to accept the composted waste. The key difference with such an organization and the City's existing Yard Waste Facility is that the organization/facility required for this strategy must accept food and other household organic waste not currently accepted by the City compost center. The City could start the pilot as a volunteer drop-off program, similar to the Easton Compost Program, which accepts residential food waste from its members on a self-serve basis behind the Easton Public Market. The EAC's Waste Reduction Committee has been exploring a similar model to Easton's for Bethlehem. Following the drop-off pilot, the program could then expand to curbside. The City would likely need separate collection trucks from those used for recycling. To encourage utilization, the City could pass ordinance mandating all commercial properties have an organic waste diversion plan and enforce it.

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